

WILLIAM A. LITTLE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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TYREE SCOTT
FORMER PRESIDENT, CENTRAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION
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INTERVIEWEE: TYREE SCOTT

INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

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[00:00:00] **TYREE:** ...And they're basically the people who now run it, I think, I'm not positive, I'm not close to it anymore.

[00:00:12] **WILLIAM:** But the factors that contributed to your demise in the organization [Central Contractors Association] was the fact that it was a transition, a transition in terms of organization ideology, a transition in the organization goals, and also that relate to philosophy by and large. That once they began to perceive themselves as a petty bourgeoisie, then their interest wasn't really related to that of the worker, by and large.

And your ideology or philosophy was directed to workers, so in other words, there had to be a conflict, a confrontation, that exists.

[00:00:50] **TYREE:** Sure, and rightfully so. We were in the wrong kind of organization. We weren't clear, ourselves, and for that matter on the fact of the basic contradiction between the employer and employee, in that employers could not speak and care about the welfare of the employees.

[00:01:12] **WILLIAM:** But the question I want to raise, and I think it's a valid question, is that the orientation of the people that make up that Central Contractors Association was essentially a working class movement, a working class organization itself?

[00:01:29] **TYREE:** In the beginning.

[00:01:30] **WILLIAM:** In the beginning, and the people, although they were contractors, they essentially identified with the worker, as opposed to the contractor as opposed to the employer. And what essentially occurred, at some point in time, is that you began to bring new folks, new people began to become involved in the organization, and their orientation was primarily that of a petty bourgeoisie, and they essentially captured the organization?

[00:02:02] **TYREE:** Yeah, that's basically what happened. The construction was there, it was basically supposed to be an employers organization.

[00:02:14] **WILLIAM:** Employers organization. But the thing about it was the people that initially started it didn't perceive themselves as employers, they perceived themselves—

[00:02:23] **TYREE:** Had that attitude been prevailing, it would have, right then and there became an Urban League kind of organization. But because of the working class background of the leadership at that time, was why it took on such a militant position.

[00:02:36] **WILLIAM:** Okay, I can see that, and it seems to be really logical, because the thing about you [was that] you had the worker orientation, worker ideology. And the fact is that they became contractors not because they were pursuing bourgeois interests in the first place, they became workers [sic, contractors] because they were trying to survive, and not only survive, but practice their trade.

[00:02:58] **TYREE:** Right.

[00:02:59] **WILLIAM:** So that's the important thing. I couldn't develop that before, I think that's a good summation of what we've got here.

[00:03:00] **TYREE:** Yeah, that's important.

[00:03:06] **WILLIAM:** But it was very difficult to get that out. And the next thing that's bothering me is that, in how do you deal with the question of the worker [pauses] organization itself, in terms of once you get away from the CCA, you begin to say—how do you begin to deal with the new constituency, the new clientele, after the separation had taken place? Now, you already suggested that you took a list of the people that were involved in the court action—no, with the letter—and got in contact with them some way, and they met new and began to form a nucleus. That organization was clear. It was clear at the beginning that you had to deal with that from a

worker perspective, I mean, from a basic worker ideology, and that problem was a reform or maybe certain types of radical overtones.

[00:04:33] **TYREE:** Basically, it was that we were in the economic phase of the struggle. The issues that we raised were purely economic issues, they not necessarily political issues, except they dealt with racism. The workers could relate the fact they were not being placed on jobs in all fairness. So they knew that they were not being treated fairly and were willing to take up some kind of, whatever kind of struggle was available to them to secure that kind of, their jobs for them. We also recognized that they were the best people suited to fight that battle. We were workers, and until we won, we wouldn't be able to work. And so on one hand, the workers provided the army, and on the other hand, the army would be depleted when the other side gave in. The people who were out in the streets raising hell were the people who got the jobs. So as long as there was a need for struggle, they struggled. In the absence of politics, the economic needs got dealt with, and in fact depleted the army, and so since those early days, since '70, '71, '72, there has not been that kind of stuff in the streets that was done by workers, because the workers were working.

[00:06:36] **WILLIAM:** Is there any other reason, beyond that, the fact that workers were working, that you didn't begin and try to mobilize a massive effort to try to confront the construction trade, or any other type of issue?

[00:06:50] **TYREE:** Yeah. We had the incorrect line, that's why we didn't do that. We didn't understand that—first of all, we thought that the economics led the politics, that if we raised the economic issues and then the worker was able to get a job, then those same workers would then address themselves to the issues inside the trade unions, which were not as important at the time as we thought. We didn't think it was as important to address them inside the trade unions, as we do now, as we did to address them inside, let's say, the community, for example, then education. We thought that those same workers would then march to the schools, two years after they got a job, and demand that the educational institutions then become responsive to the needs of the community. We thought those workers would be willing to march to the police station and demand that police brutality be stopped in the community.

I say it was an incorrect line, cause workers do that. But workers do that after having had a political education. They don't do that—I mean, economics doesn't necessarily lead to social politics. Economics basically leads to bourgeois politics. So the worker who in fact got the job two years later was trying to look like the petty bourgeois schoolteacher in his dress and in the car that he drove, or he was trying to look like other elements in the community that were not “working class people.”

[00:08:36] **WILLIAM:** Well, could we raise another issue because your union wasn't the predominant union, in other words, it was an alternative union, which didn't have the primary responsibility for the worker once he gained entrance to the union. It only had secondary responsibility once the worker gained entrance to the organization. So in other words, you didn't have the type of sanction that was necessary to put that individual into line or put that class of workers into line, where another union, which does have primary responsibility in the past, could take in dissent workers and workers that were not participating in the organization, could bring pressure to bear and force them to begin to deal with certain types of questions.

[00:09:26] **TYREE:** Yeah. But trade unions don't serve that function. I mean, historically in this country, they don't serve it, and they haven't served it in other societies that have been—well China, I use that as an example now. The Chinese trade unions never raised issues beyond economic issues, like the trade unions in this country. But there was different kinds of political organizations in terms of the trade unions, if they were to raise those kinds of political questions. And being an association external to the trade unions, we still had a relationship

with some of those workers who came through UCWA [United Construction Workers Association] or who'd been in the streets with UCWA and understood something about the spontaneity, something about the spontaneous politics that we'd been involved in, who would have listened.

Had we had any kind of understanding about—I mean, the mistake we made again was that we assumed they would go from fighting in the streets for their jobs to fighting for social stuff beyond that. We assumed that that would be automatic, and it wasn't. That was the mistake we made, it wasn't the question of having the ability to enforce our wills on them, that was a time that we all should have been involved in some kind of in the educational process, a political education process, whether that's study groups, or reading, or whatever, or just talking about it. We didn't do that. All we talked about was discrimination.

[00:11:09] **WILLIAM:** Well your primary concern wasn't—the thing about it is what your objective was, your primary objective was to get Black workers involved in the system. Your basic assumption was that if you got Black workers into the union, got them jobs, then it would raise their level of consciousness and they could begin to participate in other aspects of community life. Essentially, that's a basic, sound set of assumptions, although it probably not through. It doesn't follow through in terms of behavior characteristics.

[00:11:42] **TYREE:** We can sum it up and say it practically ain't true, it didn't work.

[00:11:45] **WILLIAM:** Well, I wouldn't agree totally that it doesn't work. I would agree that it doesn't follow in that chronological order, in terms of short span of time. I think if you expand the time frame and add other factors, other variables into the equation, then I think you would have come out with that kind of response, with that type of mix, in terms of the conscientiousness—I think a lot of studies have indicated that, if you want to look at social science studies, that the higher level of income, education does lead to a higher level of participation, and I think that's probably true.

[00:12:25] **TYREE:** Yeah, but it's a question of—we should go back, and I should say that, to say that they didn't go beyond what they were talking about. The problem with it is—and sure, the level of education, the level of income means the participation is that much more. But the participation for what? That's the question. We say like, what was the goal? The goal, our goal was quite similar to that of the Civil Rights Movement, our goal wasn't to make a revolution. The goal was to get construction jobs.

[00:13:02] **WILLIAM:** That's right.

[00:13:03] **TYREE:** So I shouldn't say that without just saying that—I mean, we didn't even clear, and we would have been like trying to go beyond what we were talking about in the beginning, people would have been clear that the construction job was a stop along the way, even though—I've got some tapes of some speeches that I made during the very beginning of the UCWA to the membership, and we talked about it in those meetings, that getting a construction job was just the very beginning of our problems. But that was all we did, we didn't have no formula for going beyond that, like how we were trying to educate people scientifically about it, how you go beyond, or any other way. We were just like saying it. And people innately understood discrimination, but they didn't innately understand capitalism. You know?

[00:13:52] **WILLIAM:** Okay, now let's deal with capitalism as a primary issue in terms of the Black community. Historically, in American society, Blacks have totally been conditioned that communism was bad, and socialism was bad, and capitalism was good. In terms of trying to force a Marxist set of ideology upon Black folks, what are the reactions of Blacks by and large, due to the certain types of conditioned response or propaganda that had been perpetrated on Blacks for an awful long time? What was the initial response to, not

only the leadership of the group, people who set policy, but the total clientele in terms of the bulk of the workers, and the community reaction to that type of philosophy? Externally, the community.

[00:14:54] **TYREE:** I think the fact that we've adopted Western religion, we've adopted Western philosophy, we've adopted a Western economic system. I think in the beginning, had we known and understood the question of what capitalism means to workers and that workers produce it all and should in fact control and receive what they produce. I think had we understood that, and we didn't, had we understood it in the early days, I'm not so sure we would have been talking to the workers about communism or socialism in those terms, just because of the kind of red flag that means to people in this society. But I think the question is like getting people to look at it and think dialectically or think scientifically about how—you know, what the conditions are, why there is racism.

You see, it manifests itself in a good way at that point, because you see, what we did was when we talked about racism, we talked about it, the whole problem in terms of color, instead of along class lines. So we, when we say the white workers were racist, we were not able to understand that the white worker might be racist, but his interests were the same as our interests, for example. His ability to oppress us was not the same as the bosses' ability to oppress us, but because the boss and the white workers were both the same color, we saw them all as being both the same thing. And so we felt the narrow issue of racism instead of—we never talked about the fact that workers—a good example a friend of mine uses now: the Boeing Company might make a hundred million dollars a year, one third of that hundred million, the workers produced that whole hundred million, for example. One third of that hundred million, or thirty-three million, gets paid to the workers in the form of wages. The other sixty-six million goes to people who don't work there, goes to the stockholders and people who don't make no airplanes, who just fly in them, or who don't have anything to do with the production of them, even as office people or people who go into the factory and work every day. And the workers could have understood that and wouldn't have fought for that in the beginning, they would have fought for like a job, that was the problem that was closest to them, but at least they could have understood that. And we didn't do that, we didn't understand that ourselves, of course.

[00:17:58] **WILLIAM:** Okay, let me raise another issue, which has been bothering me for quite a while. The whole economic point of our society in terms of jobs, we don't talk about the equal distribution of the wealth in this country, we talk about—we have accepted the role of the worker and the role of a job, and we begin to talk about the job, and now, at 3314—I'm kind of off the subject area, but 3314 is a good example of what I'm trying to say. The campaign against 3314 is that you will lose jobs, it doesn't say that we will lose profit, but they tie profit to jobs. I mean, this is a condition that most people in our society look at things in terms of a job, a job is a valid, good thing, and it determines the whole set of relationships one has in terms of your social and economic relationships: the job. And that is acceptable, the premise is nobody questions the fact of a job and a wage earner. These are things that are placed in high esteem in our society.

[00:19:24] **TYREE:** Yeah. People accept the class structure in this society already, and so the question—I mean, the Civil Rights [Act of] bill gave us our share of the pie. It didn't say at any point in time, in not one of those titles in those—however many titles? Eight titles in the Civil Rights bill, not one of those said to share the wealth. They say there must be equal jobs, they didn't say equal money, they said equal jobs. But if you go to a neighborhood in the heart of the ghetto and sit down and talk to Black people from age twenty to age eighty, and talk about inheritance and say that, "We don't believe people should be allowed to pass on their wealth," the people will argue with you all day and say, "No, why shouldn't I pass on my wealth to my children?" In most cases, they're talking about a house, and in many cases they're talking about a dining room set. But what we're talking about is the billion dollar empire that the Rockefeller family passes on to their next generation, or the

billion dollar empire that the Mellon family passes on to their next generation, and so. So people tend to support that concept of two classes in this society, or misunderstand what it means to talk about distribution of the wealth, that people who don't have nothing, who believe that if you work hard and save it, you can someday be rich. Somebody wins on a lottery ticket every now and then, one in twenty million might win a million dollars on the lottery ticket, reinforces the thing about someday you can be one of these too, you can be part of this also.

I think that the question of work, if it was put into proper perspective, that people who work produce everything that we have. If we look at it like there's people who produce and everybody consumes, if nobody produced then there'd be nothing to consume, and so in a society there are going to be people who work, we can't get out of that.

[00:21:51] **WILLIAM:** Okay, we can't get out of that, but the problem I see is that the technological aspect, the technological development within our society for the last thirty, forty years have produced a thing called a technological society, which doesn't need an awful lot of work to produce the quality or the amount of products necessary to run the society. So in other words, all the technology, the technological innovation, it has reduced the need to have an awful lot of workers producing. So in other words, now, within the capitalist system, the capitalist structure, you only need a limited amount of workforce now. If you work, then you are part of a select group of people, and you have like our gross national—well, not our gross national product, but the thing I'm trying to say is that the society can function at an unemployment rate around eight percent, which people want to be considered as normal. In other words, eight percent of the people—that's not considering the people that are not part of the workforce, otherwise you've got another ten percent of people who can't work if they want to work, or some sort of things, disabilities cause them not to be able to function in a productive way or productive sense. But you've got eight percent above that that can't work, even if they want to work, by and large. So how do you deal with that when you've always got people that get dissatisfied and always go and have a group of people competing for a minimum amount of resources, and you always take and retrain them and do all kinds of those things with them in our society? How would that fall into the argument that the worker produces everything, but right now it is that we don't really need workers when we've got machinery to produce an awful lot of that stuff also? And it gets more complicated as we go.

[00:24:13] **TYREE:** First of all, the reason for unemployment, for example, is because of overproduction in this society. Workers in Detroit, auto workers, were laid off en masse last year. They were laid off en masse because there were too many cars being made, because of the inventory that the auto makers had. So in effect, the auto workers had produced so many cars that they had to walk. That was the result of that. But there's a lot of essential and a lot of necessary, or even luxury, items that people are entitled to that they don't have because of supply and demand, or because of costs, or overproduction, in the case of the auto workers. They couldn't have cars because they'd overproduced them. They couldn't drive, they could not afford to drive a car because they didn't have a job. They didn't have a job because they'd overproduced cars. So in essence, they produced so many cars they had to walk. That duplicates itself time and time again in this society.

In a society that was a planned economy, it would be necessary that people work, it's not a question of machines that are so technologically advanced that machines can produce all the necessary goods and items for people to live on. But what would happen in a society like that is that we would start to produce other kinds of things. Machines are—in this month's issue of Dollars and Sense, there's statistics on the amount of machines, the amount of tools of production that are sitting idle could produce fifty percent more than what was produced, which means that the family of five that can't afford a car or a washing machine would then be able to have a washing machine in the planned economy. A family who couldn't afford a dishwasher—and there's nothing

decadent about a dishwasher, the only thing decadent about it is there are people who can't afford it—but that would mean producing millions more dishwashers, if they were being built for people instead of for profits.

We might be talking about a much shorter work week situation. In underdeveloped countries, in socialist countries that are underdeveloped, workers might work six days a week, as they do in China. In this society, workers might only work three days a week, but there's a need for a workforce. For example, in the auto workers, in the same industry where they laid off en masse last year, they also increased the work week from forty hours to fifty-four hours a week, mandatory fifty-four hours a week. The reason for that was that they were able to work workers, the same workers, longer hours and pay less benefits. It's easier to pay time and a half for fourteen hours than it is to pay all the other benefits to another person who might work forty hours a week. So they cut back on the workforce and increased the amount of hours the existing workforce had. So what we're talking about in a situation like that is, in fact, shortening the work week and increasing the amount of people necessary to do the work. That make sense to you?

[00:28:11] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, that's a good argument. Let me get back to the study. [laughs] I got my explanation for worker problems, so I got an explanation for the organizational behavior thing. What I need to do now is go back in and...

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:28:55] **TYREE:** What kind of organization efforts went into planning and implementing the closure of those construction jobs in 1969?

[00:29:02] **WILLIAM:** In 1969, at the beginning.

[00:29:05] **TYREE:** It was spontaneous. I guess spontaneity can mean a lot of things. But it was spontaneous in that there was no plan to close down the King County Administration Building two days before it was closed down. We went first to the Garfield [Medgar Evers] swimming pool and stopped that.

[00:29:31] **WILLIAM:** But how did that occur? You just went there, you didn't have any intent at all, you just went there and all of a sudden somebody said, "Let's close the job down?"

[00:29:39] **TYREE:** Oh no, no. We decided that night before at a meeting. I talked about it in terms of it. When we first got organized, we decided that after we saw that we were not going to be able to get anywhere with the discussions that went on with both the trade unions and the employers around more contracts for minority contractors and more jobs for minority workers, that we were going to have to take some affirmative steps. It really took off on the same day that I talked about these two guys coming to my father's office applying for jobs. There was a meeting that night, and in recounting that story about those guys that applied and they sent two white workers out, a lot of other folks had experienced that at some level, and so it was very clear on that.

[00:30:32] **WILLIAM:** Let me ask some more questions, I hate to interrupt. Was the CCA an ongoing organization prior to all that?

[00:30:32] **TYREE:** Yeah, the CCA was started about six to eight months before that, in March.

[00:30:46] **WILLIAM:** That was March of '69? And the demonstrations start—

[00:30:49] **TYREE:** The demonstrations took place about September.

[00:30:52] **WILLIAM:** September of '69?

[00:30:56] **TYREE:** Right.

[00:30:57] **WILLIAM:** So you got about five months lag time. And during that time you were meeting monthly, or weekly, or what?

[00:31:05] **TYREE:** The employers?

[00:31:06] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, the CCA.

[00:31:08] **TYREE:** Oh, you mean each other? We met on a monthly basis, but there was meetings in between that, maybe every week or something, a group doing leadership was meeting.

[00:31:19] **WILLIAM:** Okay, approximately how many members?

[00:31:22] **TYREE:** At the time, probably about fifty, and probably twenty of those were active. The rest never showed up for meetings or came every now and then.

[00:31:34] **WILLIAM:** Who funded the organization?

[00:31:36] **TYREE:** Nobody. We funded it out of our pockets.

[00:31:38] **WILLIAM:** Okay, got it. Okay, now let's go back, I just wanted to make sure I had the stuff accurate.

[00:31:53] **TYREE:** That night there was a lot of folks who could relate to that. I mean, probably a lot of those contractors who were there could relate to what happened to them themselves. And so we decided the next day to—the meeting, as a matter of fact, was being held on 22nd [Avenue] and East Cherry [Street] at the Baptist church there, the Cherry Street Church [Cherry Hill Baptist Church], and the swimming pool was a block and a half away.

[00:32:22] **WILLIAM:** Cherry Street Baptist Church?

[00:32:23] **TYREE:** Mhm. [affirmatively] And the swimming pool was just a block away from there. So we talked about it that night, and we decided that we were going to stop the project from going. We'd go over there and make some demands, and if they refused those demands, just tell them they can't work in the neighborhood. So that was the kind of planning that went into that. So the next morning—there was maybe thirty people at the meeting that night. So the next morning thirteen or fourteen of us showed up over there and the contractor or the superintendent or whoever was really surprised that here come fifteen Black men on this job saying, "Hire five of us or get out of the neighborhood." I don't remember how many people we said to hire, but we told him that he was breaking the law, and we didn't want him working in the neighborhood. He was caught in a situation where—well, his bosses who he called were surprised and didn't know what to do, how to handle it, and so they closed the job down and left. That was something that was all over the front page of the paper that day.

[00:33:41] **WILLIAM:** So the newspaper played a very important role?

[00:33:44] **TYREE:** Oh yeah, they played it up. It was front page, all over the front page, in bold writing.

[00:33:47] **WILLIAM:** Did the newspaper headline have a significant positive effect for your organization?

[00:33:59] **TYREE:** Mhm. [affirmatively] For them too, though. I mean, if you look in retrospect at what that meant to management, it played a very positive role for them, too.

[00:34:11] **WILLIAM:** Well it played a positive role in getting your organization organized together?

[00:34:13] **TYREE:** Yeah. I mean, that's how all the people in the neighborhood found out that something was happening. It was all over the television screens that night. And so the next day there was instead of thirteen people, a hundred. And we did exactly what you would expect. We went downtown that day instead of going someplace else.

[00:34:41] **WILLIAM:** Now, you might've went downtown if you didn't have that mass public support?

[00:34:45] **TYREE:** No. With thirteen people? No way would we have gone downtown.

[00:34:50] **WILLIAM:** So yeah, thirteen folks, and because of the news media, it took and expanded the support in your ranks to a hundred and some people?

[00:34:59] **TYREE:** Yeah. It probably was a couple hundred people the second day, it was a lot of people going out. And you know it was something that everyone in the community could relate to. I mean, Reverend [Samuel] McKinney from Mount Zion Baptist Church was out there, Phil Burton, who was a lawyer, was out there. It was a united front in terms of like the kind of support that came out. It was like motherhood, nobody was opposed to that, everybody could relate to the fact that Blacks were discriminated against in the construction trade.

[00:35:40] **WILLIAM:** So didn't have—what you generated was some latent emotion within the community. It was there, but it wasn't manifested.

[00:35:58] **TYREE:** Yeah, we kind of put a head on it, you know.

[00:36:00] **WILLIAM:** So you had a latent emotion.

[00:36:11] **TYREE:** And we had what was absolutely necessary to build that kind of movement. What we didn't understand was that [support] was absolutely necessary and we don't have that now. We don't have Phil Burton's support, we don't have Reverend McKinney's support, nor do we have the support of the Black churches en masse. Most Black churches probably don't come down on us quite the way Reverend McKinney did, because we stopped his job that time.

People always ask me too, "Why did you back off of that? How come you—a lot of people in that church didn't agree with him, they agreed with you guys." But we were wrong, and whether they agreed with us or not, the point is that in order to put forward a mass based struggle in this community, you've got to have the support of those different elements in the community, whether that's Reverend McKinney or whether that's Lem Howell. Those people have people who follow them and who get their support, or their objection to it is going to cause a big split and an argument over something that ain't even real. The winner of an argument between me and Reverend McKinney gets to win the argument, that's all.

[00:37:41] **WILLIAM:** Okay, so you saw that—well, I didn't want to get to McKinney, we're ahead of ourselves.

[00:37:47] **TYREE:** No, I was just talking about what we had at that point. We had a united front in terms of like who was out there in the streets. So that was like the cat from the pool hall was out there, the unemployed worker, and the lawyer, and the ministers.

[00:38:07] **WILLIAM:** So you had a motherhood issue in terms of Black interest?

[00:38:10] **TYREE:** Yeah, folks could relate to it.

[00:38:16] **WILLIAM:** Then with the latent issue, which you brought and made into a manifested type of thing. Now, let's move into the other thing. Once we got into this type of organizational setting and got into the public domain or public arena and newspapers got involved in the thing, who identified you as the leader? Who forced you into

the light, or did you force yourself into that position?

[00:38:48] **TYREE:** I was the president of the Association from the beginning.

[00:38:50] **WILLIAM:** Oh, you was already the president. [pauses] Okay. Who called the meeting—I'm going backward—who called the meeting for the CCA, called the initial meeting to organize the CCA back in March of 1969?

[00:39:19] **TYREE:** Let me see. Model Cities was involved in that, but I'm trying to figure out exactly what the sequence is. Oh, that's exactly what happened. The Model Cities was going around talking to businessmen, I don't think just building contractors, but mostly like small businessmen. And somehow or other, this woman who worked for the Model Cities program named Jean McGee, who was interested in minority contractors.

[00:39:56] **WILLIAM:** She still around?

[00:39:57] **TYREE:** Yeah, she's still around, her phone number is EA2-8865. We keep calling back and forth and she's leaving me messages and I keep forgetting to call her back.

We met, and Model Cities was responsible for that meeting coming off. It wasn't an attempt to organize a separate contractors association, but getting people together and asking what are the problems of minority contractors, for example. And we put forward—I think I put forward the first meeting, but other contractors related to it, the question of being organized into an association of contractors. That was in the early spring, maybe March or April of '69.

[00:41:29] **WILLIAM:** Okay. Now we've got that, how that was organized, I was wondering how you started. Okay. Now we can go back to the point where you were talking about the planning. You said the first one was a spontaneous type of thing, wasn't totally spontaneous, was semi-planned in a sense. And the second was the support was a spontaneous thing in itself. Now how did—from that point on, how did things begin to move, and what kind of strategy, what kind of tactics was developed?

[00:42:06] **TYREE:** The only tactic was we decided that the legitimacy, the handle we had was that the contractors were actually in violation of the law. But that law only applied to public projects.

[00:42:25] **WILLIAM:** And not private projects?

[00:42:26] **TYREE:** Not private projects.

[00:42:27] **WILLIAM:** So in other words, you only could operate in the public arena?

[00:42:32] **TYREE:** Right. They were building at the time either the Seattle First National Bank or the IBM Building, something like that downtown, one of those private projects. I remember we never went to that, because there was no public money in it. But where there was public money, then they were either caught under the

[00:42:58] **WILLIAM:** Laws of the state, the state law, or the executive order?

[00:43:01] **TYREE:** Right, or the federal government, or the city. So we had them right there. For example, there was an addition being put on to the—well, the projects we stopped were the swimming pool, which was a Forward Thrust project, the King County Courthouse, because it had the county's money, in addition to the old King County Hospital now, the Public Service Hospital, it either had [?healed burden?] funds—it had federal money, I don't know where it came from. And we stopped a fire station, the one on between 13th [Avenue] and 14th [Avenue] on Pike Street, on Pine Street, and then, of course, all the projects at the University, there was a lot of those, and at the airport.

[00:44:04] **WILLIAM:** Okay, let's go back. We've got the jobs listed. Now what was the strategy to go there? I remember at some point in time that you was articulating that there shouldn't be nonviolence in unions, et cetera, et cetera?

[00:44:15] **TYREE:** There shouldn't be nonviolence?

[00:44:21] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, nonviolence by and large, that your organization wouldn't precipitate violence.

[00:44:27] **TYREE:** Yeah, well...

[00:44:28] **WILLIAM:** Well we can start back at the courthouse. I don't know exactly what pursuit once you went downtown at the Courthouse. What was the initial, the safeguard to stop any sort of mass violence and mass arrest or some of the other types of things that was necessary, and some type of legal system?

[00:44:48] **TYREE:** Oh yeah, well, the whole question of like—we were really aware that at the time, I don't know why, we knew that if went onto a construction site and the demonstrator got close enough to the white workers, a confrontation would break out between them and fights and stuff, so we guarded against that like allowing that to happen. So when we went to construction sites, we would like go and surround the site, for example, and go in and talk to the superintendent and read the Riot Act to him, like tell him he was in violation of the executive order, or the state fair employment law, the city fair employment law, whatever, and ask that he close the project down. That went relatively good. What we did, there were small instances when we'd normally go to the project, and while we were talking to them, we would like put forth our own militant line. And then we'd go in and pull the main switches for example on the...that feeds the power tools, and that in essence stops the work on the project. If they were running the cement truck, you cut the engine off on the truck and the truck is really in trouble, they can't sit there without turning. You always see them turning all the time? They sit there, that cement just, you know, runs, and you can destroy that whole big pan back there and, of course, the cement. So they're really fragile in terms of being easy to close down.

The problem we were worried about was some hot head throwing a rock, either from the crowd or from the site itself, at the workers, or at the demonstrators, either way. So we had to guard against that, cause we just knew that that would turn public sentiment against us. That wasn't the easiest thing to do sometimes, cause somebody wanted to get into a fight, or the white workers would want to get into a fight, so we just mainly kept a distance between the workers and the demonstrators.

[00:46:57] **WILLIAM:** Social distance, huh?

[00:46:58] **TYREE:** Yeah. But we'd cut off like all the machines we could get our hands on. And there were incidents all the time where that happened, where there was a machine and there was a white worker near, and you'd go cut the machine off and he'd grab somebody, and somebody would grab him. There was a couple of times when a couple of guys got really roughed up a lot, pretty bad.

[00:47:27] **WILLIAM:** So in other words, that you had some sort of discipline within the organization itself to control certain aspects? Who was the police people that were assigned to police? How many people were assigned to carry out various functions in terms of maintaining that kind of order?

[00:47:45] **TYREE:** It didn't necessarily come from the contractors. It mostly came from the young student activists: Michael Ross at the time, Larry Gossett, people like that.

[00:48:21] **WILLIAM:** Okay, so you got—

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

...and the movement began to expand and get more public coverage and more community support, then it seems to me you probably have to place some safeguards in terms of how you'd proceed how you were perceived by the public. What kind of—did you move into a much more intensive planning stage, or are you still operating from basic spontaneity that existed when you first started?

[00:49:11] **TYREE:** Some people did. You know, people planned anyway, then tried to figure out and anticipate what they would do. I'm sad to say, I think I was one of those people who just reacted to what they did, and who didn't plan. And we might've thought about it, but we really didn't sit down and try to figure out what's going to be the response of these people. See, we never identified any of it. Keep in mind, we were down there stopping the contractors' jobs, but we didn't know whether they would sit down with the white workers and everybody and decide to do something the next day, or whatever. We put them all in one big category together and didn't realize that there were gonna be two strategies: one from the trade union leadership and one coming from the management leadership. We might have looked for some strategy on the part of an individual employer who was a big employer, for example. So if I had to answer that, I'd say that basically we continued to do, continued to react to what the man did in spontaneous kinds of reactions.

[00:50:31] **WILLIAM:** Okay, let's move further down, in terms of the University [of Washington]. The first time you shut down a University job, very little happened the first time. I think at Meany Hall, when they were building Meany Hall, I don't know what year that was.

[00:50:49] **TYREE:** Well, the University right away, if I can remember, the first day we went out there was when a lot of the stuff happened. They were building the quadrangle. You know the Quad, up on the corner? It's

the big building on the corner of 45th [Street] and 15th Avenue. It's the biggest building out there, the one with a great big underground parking and stuff.

[00:51:15] **WILLIAM:** Oh, you mean Kane Hall, or are you talking about Meany Hall? It's Kane or Meany, one of the two.

[00:51:19] **TYREE:** The new one, whichever one that is.

[00:51:20] **WILLIAM:** Oh, you mean the [Odegaard] library too, the undergraduate library.

[00:51:23] **TYREE:** There's a great big master building there, it's all one big complex. That building. There was a hole there, about six or seven stories deep.

[00:51:32] **WILLIAM:** That was the first time?

[00:51:33] **TYREE:** That was the first time.

[00:51:34] **WILLIAM:** Which was in '69?

[00:51:34] **TYREE:** Yeah. That was the time, when we got out there, they knew we were coming, for one thing. They knew we were coming. We basically employed the same tactic every day for three or four days prior to that on every project that we'd been going on. We would go on the project and keep people at a distance from the workers, and demand that they close the project down. Well, this was the John Sellen Construction Company that had the project, and they had a strategy about that time. And this is only like the second week of the demonstrations. And so we went up to the employer and to the superintendent on the job, which was about maybe two hundred, two hundred fifty feet from the gate, and we walked in the mud and stuff, like six or seven of us went up there to talk to him, ask him to close the job down, and he said no.

Well, the problem with that was that there were maybe like two hundred fifty of us and maybe two hundred fifty white workers, but they were spread out from one end of that project to the other end of that project. So that's like three blocks, and some of them way down in the hole over here, two hundred fifty feet away, two hundred fifty yards away, and over at the other end on the hill, two hundred fifty yards between them, and there was trucks on one side operating and bulldozers and cranes in the hole operating. So it wasn't like you could just wander over to the machines on a complex like the county building and take the key out of the machine or something. And then there was like busloads of policemen parked out on the streets.

[00:53:42] **WILLIAM:** Police entered this time?

[00:53:43] **TYREE:** Oh yeah, they were there.

[00:53:44] **WILLIAM:** Police weren't in any of the other ones before?

[00:53:47] **TYREE:** They had mobilized for the county, for example, but they never like left the police station. They were inside the police station, which was right across the street.

[00:53:54] **WILLIAM:** Alright, so you got police involvement for the first time? Direct involvement?

[00:53:57] **TYREE:** Oh yeah. I can't remember now. There were at least a couple hundred of them, two or three hundred policemen in great big buses, city buses. And they were standing there waiting too, to see what

would happen, and they had no reason to believe that it would be anything beyond what had been happening. I mean, that's the kind of non-cooperation between those people, cause they should have known—I assume they'd said that they were not going to close the job that day. So the president of the University was over at the administration building, so we asked the superintendent to close the job, he then deferred to his boss, who then deferred to the president of the University. His boss was somewhere in the north end, at the office, where the office was located downtown. So we told him that we wanted to stop the job until they got an answer back. They continued to work.

So people started coming in, coming on into the site, and we were trying to find out how we were going to deal with it. So we just sent people to different machines to cut them off. The bulldozer with the operator and the oiler, we sent four guys over to cut it off and get off the machine. The problem with that was some of them got into fights, and it became a free for all. There was one guy way down in the hole somewhere who refused to stop running his machine, and some guy went down there to stop him, and the guy wouldn't stop running it. It was just a water pump that pumped water out of the hole. And so the demonstrator hit the construction worker, really hit him hard too. And so they had to—anyway, that started it.

People started going all over the place, beating windows and vehicles, and busting the windows out of the trucks and stuff. One of the guys got up on a bulldozer and started it up, put it in gear, and the bulldozer's like twenty feet from the cliff, that kind of sequence was happening. First, a bunch of fellows went over to a truck and pushed it over the hill into this pit, which was maybe like a hundred yards deep, three hundred feet or something. And then this guy gets up on the bulldozer and starts it up, puts it in gear, and it stumbled over the same cliff and fell on top of the truck, and it destroyed the truck. The machine, they dug it out of the hole and turned it over and it operated, a week or so later. But it completely destroyed the truck. And one guy was trying to light a diesel [laughs] gas tank, it was really ridiculous, it would have literally blown his head off and a lot of us, too. But he took this rag and stuck it off in the gas tank and wet it, it was diesel, and his matches was wet, it was raining that day, and he couldn't get his matches to strike and he was working really hard, [laughs] trying to get it to light. And I didn't understand, and I was standing there watching, and so were a lot of other people. Somebody came up who had some mechanical sense, and said, "Don't do that, it'll kill us all," and they took the matches from him, and he never got a chance to light it.

Of course, when the bulldozer went over there, they stopped work. The University president came out and everybody else, and they stopped the project. And we got right into our cars and headed out for the Seattle-Tacoma airport that same day. Did you want me to finish up that day, or did you want me to stop at the University?

[00:58:13] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, what happened, what transpired—well, what did the police do? You said the police was mobilized and then you don't say anything else about them. Did they intervene, or what did they do?

[00:58:24] **TYREE:** Oh yeah, I was getting it wrong, that wasn't exactly what happened. We didn't go to the airport that day. What happened was the cops came in after the people came in, but the cops had to get out of the buses, get into formation and march in, and by the time they got in, all the damage was done. That's what happened. And then we split back outside, we ran outside onto 45th Street and regrouped again on the sidewalks, and the cops came out and started selectively to arrest people. And we got into a medley with the cops, a free for all with the cops, and about twelve or fifteen of us were arrested and taken downtown that day. And within about six hours, we were all out. That's what happened. The project was actually closed that day.

[00:59:19] **WILLIAM:** So you didn't go down to the airport that day? You went to jail that day.

[00:59:21] **TYREE:** No. We went to jail that day.

[00:59:24] **WILLIAM:** Okay. Now, what happened once you got to jail? How did your lawyers get you out within six hours?

[00:59:33] **TYREE:** They made a really dumb mistake. They charged us—some people were charged with destruction of property, some were charged with trespassing, some were charged—they charged four of us with conspiracy: Larry Gossett, Michael Ross, myself and another guy who we called Tiny. Yeah, that's what happened. But they put up bail for us that day.

[01:00:03] **WILLIAM:** Who put up bail?

[01:00:05] **TYREE:** People from the demonstrators and people from the community. Some of them were released on PR [personal recognizance] and bail, like a hundred dollars or something.

[01:00:15] **WILLIAM:** Paid by community folks? Bail paid by community leaders, or community what?

[01:00:24] **TYREE:** Just people who were involved in the demonstrations and stuff, maybe some organizations, I'm not even sure.

[01:00:29] **WILLIAM:** It seems to me it would have to be some kind of organization that was supporting this whole thing at some point in time.

[01:00:34] **TYREE:** No, nobody was supporting us at that point, it was—

[01:00:36] **WILLIAM:** I mean unorganized—

[01:00:41] **TYREE:** It was helter skelter. I mean, CCA probably paid the bail, some contractors might have pitched in fifty dollars apiece or something, but there was only like four or five of us that had to have bail money, so it took like three or four hundred dollars to get everybody out of jail.

[01:01:01] **WILLIAM:** Okay. How about the next day? It was the next day when you went out to the airport?

[01:01:05] **TYREE:** No, we went back to the University the next day.

[01:01:07] **WILLIAM:** Oh, back to the University the next day. What occurred at that point in time?

[01:01:10] **TYREE:** Well, the setting was exactly the same: same police, same construction site and everything. We knew that—well what we did, instead of going to the Quad, we went around the back of the University and closed down all the little projects, warmed them up. I'll never forget that day. We went across and closed down what is now the—not the Law School—the School of Architecture and Urban Planning or something, and we were out there on the street, actually. Now, across the street from that they were building the building where Sam Kelly had his office at.

[01:01:55] **WILLIAM:** Schmitz Hall?

[01:01:56] **TYREE:** Schmitz Hall. So we went and stopped that. But coming between those two buildings, there were different contractors, see. P. D.Q was building Schmitz Hall, and I don't know who was building the architecture building—no, it wasn't the architecture building, it was Schmitz Hall, that was all. But we had

stopped the job, there was an underground tunnel down at the other end of 15th, and we had crossed the street and were coming up, and the laundry man—one of those trucks you see in the Frito-Lay man delivering Fritos in, something with the seat—sits up really high, and the guy is almost standing as he drives. It was one of them, with the doors open. And he drove up in front of where the demonstrators were. The demonstrators were crossing the street against the light. And he drove up and started cursing and screaming and all kinds of racial slurs about these Niggers running across, “Get out of the way,” and blowing his horn. But he thought it was just a bunch of people, he didn't realize it was a demonstration. So one of the guys walked in one side, beat him up, and walked out the other side, before he even knew what happened. It was so funny, he sat there, and when he got up off the floor and got back into his seat, the light changed and he just drove on, like nothing had happened. It was the funniest thing. It probably was the very incorrect thing to do, but it sure was funny at the time.

Anyway, we got over, and we stopped Schmitz Hall, there was no problem there. PDQ agreed to close the job down, the company did anyway. And then we were coming up against Sellen who was the antagonist, and the big job, so we crossed the street, and the police were there en masse. But again, they couldn't do anything until after the act, or until the act started. So we just marched right into the site, and they marched in too, but Sellen had already made the decision that if we came, he'd close down. So they closed down. We gathered back out on the streets and decided to take the airport.

So we got in the cars and decided we'd rendezvous in the parking lot at the Seattle-Tacoma Airport. If you can remember at all how parking used to be before they did all that stuff to it, it was in the front of the airport. So we all went out there, and we parked. See the problem with that—not the problem for us but the problem for them was that the city police only have jurisdiction inside the city limits, and then you must use state troopers and the county police outside of the city limits. And so the county only had a workforce of eight or nine police.

[01:04:47] **WILLIAM:** No, Seattle, the city, they have their own police.

[01:04:49] **TYREE:** Yeah, but they only had like nine or ten of them on duty. And so we got out there, we went upstairs to talk to the leadership and the people who were running the airport, and they said, “No, we can't close down our job.” And then they went and got, in about ten minutes time, they had all of the representatives from these construction companies in this conference room, about thirty of them. They were doing the whole airport expansion at the time, millions of dollars worth of work. I think it was a couple hundred million dollars worth of work going on out there: extension of the runway, new parking apron, new terminal, new parking lots, everything.

So we said we wanted the project closed down, we were really selling wolf tickets because again, these projects are even worse than the University: one at the north end of the runway, one at the south end of the runway, one at the parking lot across the street, at one end of the terminal, it was really spread out. There was no way we could cover that whole airport to stop it, and they knew that, too. So they said—it was a very dramatic scene, with these thirty different men sitting in this room at this big long conference table, and it was long enough to accommodate them all on one side almost, and me and Michael Ross and—no, it was me and Phil Hayasaka, from the Human Rights Department, just retired—were standing on the other side. And the leadership of the Port decided to poll these people, and each one—there were probably some who would have said “No” or “Yes, we'll close it down,” except the hard core was on the side of opposing, and they all said no. And by the time they got halfway through, it was clear that the fifteen people who said no, the other 15 were going to say no also, and that our bluff had been called that day. And all over they kept shaking their heads, “No, no, we're not going to close.” And we knew we couldn't close their job down, and they knew we couldn't close them down either. Plus, it was rumored that the white workers had brought their hunting rifles and shotguns and stuff. There

was some skycap outside, he was telling us about this, who was really like relating to us, as a matter of fact, some skycaps joined the demonstration.

So what we decided to do—well, here's what happened: We went outside, walked outside of the office, Michael Ross was standing there, so me and Michael and Phil Hayasaka took the elevator together back down to the main floor to go outside where people were waiting. And Michael suggested that we go out onto the runway, and that was precisely what needed to be done. So I don't know what they were thinking, first of all. I have no idea what was going through their minds as to what we were gonna do, except that some of the workers might have been armed, and they had known they could stand us off that way. But they didn't put no kinds of organized resistance to us. There was a couple of those airport cops that were maybe following around with us.

We went right downstairs and told everybody to get in a group, like columns of threes or something, and then we walked down to a place that was open. While we were there talking for a few minutes, Michael went and scouted out a route we could take through the terminal, under the terminal, that would get us out onto the runway. And by the time he came back, I had been talking to the people about how to line up and stuff, and where to march to.

[01:08:49] **WILLIAM:** The Marine Corps came back. [laughs]

[01:08:52] **TYREE:** Yeah. So we had them in columns of threes, and we marched down toward this hole and then we took off in a single file, and we had one guy at the front telling everybody to put their cigarettes out, no smoking on the apron because of the danger of fuel and stuff. And we knew that that was the key to it, that they could not afford to have people out there, inexperienced people out there smoking cigarettes and stuff, as those planes are vulnerable to that. So we marched along the apron, right near the aircraft, and that was the first time they had realized what we were doing. And so they rushed over, and this guy came running out in his emergency vehicle, I believe he was the head of the Airport, and wanted to know what the hell was going on. So we told him we wanted all the construction projects shut down, or we were going to like blow up some airplanes.

And so of course they can't man aircraft while you're out there like that, so they had the aircraft in flight patterns up in the sky, and they had aircraft getting ready to leave that they had to like taxi out of there, plus they had all these Niggers out here on the runway threatening to blow up these airplanes, having cigarettes or whatever. So we lined up in single file, arm-in-arm and stretched like a fourth of the parking apron. An airplane technically could have landed on the runway, cause we were not on the runway, we were on the parking apron, but we had everything blocked off, which don't work, by the way, cause we tried it and it didn't. They just called our bluff, and drove right through us. But it worked there.

So what happened was—then they came running with this fire truck, and we tell them, “Look, get that truck out of here or we're going to go ahead and light up.” And so they had lives to worry about, you know how they act, they had airplanes to worry about, they had jobs to worry about, more than anything else. And about five minutes later, he was back saying all the projects were going to be closed down. So we said, “We're going to stay here an hour until everything is closed and all the workers have gotten into their vehicles and gone home.” We wanted them off the sites. So like twenty minutes later he came back and said they were all gone, and somebody went and looked at a couple of the sites, and workers were gone.

So we had done it. We got away with adventurism. [laughs] Took the fort with an empty gun, that's what we did. [laughs] So then they got us, they said, "Let's negotiate." And that was the end, that was the beginning of the end. [laughs]

[01:11:42] **WILLIAM:** When did the governor and those people come into play?

[01:11:46] **TYREE:** A week later. You know, I mean, the following week we started negotiating.

[01:11:51] **WILLIAM:** Okay, but anything else, did any other contract shutdowns occur between that time and the time you started negotiating?

[01:11:56] **TYREE:** No, the airport was the last one in that whole series of demonstrations. Now this is two weeks—

[01:12:02] **WILLIAM:** This is in '69?

[01:12:04] **TYREE:** Yeah.

[01:12:04] **WILLIAM:** From Garfield, in two weeks period of time had intensified the struggle to a larger area, and you had community support and a lot of those types of things?

[01:12:12] **TYREE:** Yeah. And another whole element I mentioned in that point, the radical Black community, the people from the left in the Black community were also involved at that point.

[01:12:35] **WILLIAM:** So we can say the nationalists by and large, probably?

[01:12:38] **TYREE:** Yeah, I'm not so sure that they were nationalists, but they were certainly—they were more seasoned to that kind of like street action than any of us, any of the contractors, or anybody else. And so those guys were like marshalls in demonstrations. And invariably, I listened to them in terms of tactics all the time, and that also created a problem among the contractors, for example, for a lot of the wrong reasons, too. [Benjamin] McAdoo accused me of talking to Michael Ross and not talking to him, for example.

[01:13:17] **WILLIAM:** McAdoo?

[01:13:18] **TYREE:** Yeah. Ben McAdoo, the architect. He was also on the board of CCA at the time. He was the architect who had been a Black leader in the NAACP and all of that, and that was really close to him. And he would get upset because Michael Ross would be giving me advice, and he didn't like that. There was all the paranoia in there, everybody was the police and stuff. I remember there was a group of contractors—the contractors also had to be the right, left, and the middle forces.

[01:14:02] **WILLIAM:** Oh they did, huh.

[01:14:04] **TYREE:** Yeah. There were some genuine left forces in the contractors and there were some opportunistic left forces in the contractors. There was a guy named Milton Norwood, Milton Dixon, Leon Ward, and those guys were genuinely the militants. They had all packed guns and were pretty tough guys. They would say something, and they genuinely meant it. I didn't realize at the time they meant it, because they used to threaten me, and I didn't have enough sense to get scared. [laughs] Later they showed in their actions that they were serious. One night—And there was like L.B. Curry, and L.B. Curry was the opportunistic left. I mean, he

was really afraid of everybody, but he always talked big and played tough. And then there was Hank Roney, you know who he is? Yeah, he's still around, Henry Roney.

[01:15:20] **WILLIAM:** Was he in the right or the left?

[01:15:23] **TYREE:** He was in the left also. He was the left militant. And then the right forces was Ben McAdoo, Jim Takisaki, and most of the other like moderate cats. And then there was the young people like myself, who were like more in the middle.

But these guys—one time at the University, the second day at the University, the first day we all got beat up and stuff fighting the cops, these contractors were not visible in the demonstrations, they left. So we asked them that night, “Where were you guys at?” They said they were off in the background with the pieces, and they was going to off the pigs when the shit went down. But the shit had gone down, and nobody got offed. [laughs] The story one of them told was that their gun misfired. Whether their guns had misfired, but in fact it didn't misfire anyway.

Let me see. At some point, I will tell you about the story about Hank Roney, it was probably one of the most bizarre things that ever happened to me in my life. One night—well, anyway, we're in negotiations now. The negotiations really take on another whole light, and we finally got ripped off in those negotiations. There was also a struggle going on for the leadership. The Contractors Association had now come into its own. In the beginning, Hank Roney had a group called The Group. Even though he was involved in the CCA, as a member, maybe even a board member, he was also considered—he also had this group he called The Group. And The Group was made up of like both Black people, but mostly white people, and it was really strange to me. Keep in mind, I hadn't been involved in this kind of stuff before. In about the second or third day of the demonstrations, he started putting forth that the demonstrations were a coalition of the CCA and The Group, and he had two or three white boys with him who were supposed to be militant, I mean, they weren't like white liberals, they were like white hitters. And I couldn't understand that. And most of us just didn't take it serious, except there were two or three guys on the left who supported Hank. But there were a lot of other elements in there. Another element that was involved in it was a group called the Black United Front.

[01:18:16] **WILLIAM:** Okay, who was that?

[01:18:19] **TYREE:** That was—oh man, what's his name? [pauses] The guy who's now like the head minister at the mosque.

[01:18:29] **WILLIAM:** Oh, you mean George, Minister George?

[01:18:31] **TYREE:** No, not George. David Neals?

[01:18:32] **WILLIAM:** Oh Neals, okay.

[01:18:34] **TYREE:** David was also involved in The Group. David was the head of the Black United Front. But then there was Keve Bray, who was like the godfather of this group, and there was Gross. They had a newspaper they used to write at the time.

[01:18:55] **WILLIAM:** The Afro-American Journal.

[01:18:56] **TYREE:** Afro-American Journal. And so a couple of these guys on the left in the contractors group was also tied into this group down there, that's where their first loyalty was. And there was a guy named the

“Bone Crusher.” I can’t remember his name now, I’ll think of it before this is over. The Bone Crusher went with us the first day of the demonstrations. The Garfield swimming pool, the Bone Crusher went over there and scared everybody. He was a great big guy, great big shoulders, his waist was about 28 [inches], he was about 6’5, he was just a big guy.

And so, this is all outside of Central Contractors, now. There was all like another group down there that I didn’t even know existed at the time. This was like, a week, two weeks, maybe three weeks into the demonstrations. At Harborview Hospital, Hank Roney—we had decided—the three of us were talking to the press, but I was supposed to be the only person talking to the press. So Hank Roney was in making his bid to take over the leadership of the demonstrations and stuff. So Hank starts talking to newspaper reporters and making statements that nobody had cleared or talked to him about. So Lem Howell approached him and said, “Wait a minute, I thought you guys had decided that one person would be the spokesman.” So then Hank jumped on Lem Howell right there in front of the TV cameras and everybody, and somebody stopped him and broke it up.

Anyway, that night, people really got on Hank and ostracized him about it. That afternoon after the demonstrations, at the YMCA over on 23rd [Avenue] and Olive [Street], they had a meeting. Well, now they all got their guns, the left contractors have got their guns. But there were guys who were like straight up people who didn’t have no guns and didn’t think about guns and stuff, and would leave if they heard about guns: the Jim Takisakis, Carl Wileys, much of them were regular contractors. And then there was this one bunch of people who always packed their guns. There was another guy too, Hershey Sampson, who was one of them, who was a painting contractor, he was part of the left, he was part of the opportunistic left, but he would kill you too, he’d shoot you too. So this particular day, people criticized Hank for doing what he did in front of the public, and you know, it was really bad for the image of the organization and stuff. Hank also had a bodyguard.

Keve Bray then, who was over here who I’d never met yet, he’d never been to a demonstration yet, he’s back over there pulling the strings with his little group. And all this, like, I don’t even know the stuff that goes on. So that day they put a contract out on Hank, but we didn’t know that. So we had the meeting at the Y that day, and there was a lot of people clamoring for the leadership at that point. I was really naive at that point, I didn’t know how to deal with it, nor was I worried about it. I should’ve been worried about it, but I didn’t understand at the time. So Hank’s bodyguard got up and ran Hank’s position and Hank said he’s the godfather, and he got the support from these people in the contractors group who were also related to Keve Bray. And this went on for a half hour or so.

Then we left and went that night to the public meeting at the YWCA over on Cherry [Street] and 29th Avenue. So we get there, we had the meeting, there was a lot of discussion, disunity and some unity, whatever, just planning for the next day. So then the meeting is over with. I went downstairs either to go to the toilet or get my coat or something, and my brother stopped me in the hall and said, “Don’t go out there, don’t go out there.” So I said, “Well, what’s happening out there?” He said, “Don’t go out there.” So I decided to go, I wanted to see what it was. I went rushing to the door, and I see this big crowd of people out by this car, and I see this guy walking off, I think it’s the Bone Crusher walking away. But what happened was the Bone Crusher walked up and caught Hank coming in the meeting or going out the meeting, I think it happened before the meeting, I keep getting them mixed up. But he beat Hank to a pulp. [laughs] I mean, it was really pathetic, but he had beat him so bad, he crawled under the car, he got him by his feet, pulled him out, kicked him and beat him, and just really like messed him up. And meanwhile Hank’s bodyguard was standing right there, he didn’t do nothing. [laughs] L.B. Curry then got briefcases full of guns and stuff, and they didn’t do nothing.

The other part of it was, the rest of these left contractors had one foot in the camp of Keve Bray and one foot in the CCA. But like it was democratic centralism and they were responsible to the other group over there. In

retrospect, that's how it was. Their loyalty lied with the Black United Front, or whatever they called it, the Black House, or whatever.

But anyway, that night I got the lesson in my life. In a way I was glad, cause Hank had been acting a fool, but in a way, of course, you don't want to see people get beat like that. So I went on home, and about two o'clock that morning I got this phone call: "Tyree, this is Hank. I've got to see you, it's important. I want you come across the Mercer Island Bridge and there's a telephone booth at the first exit. Leave the exit, come to the phone booth, there'll be someone there who will pick you up and bring you to my house." It was really bizarre, really clandestine. If it happened now, I'd say, "No, I'll see you tomorrow." But at the time, I just couldn't do no wrong, so I say, "Yeah, I'm going to go see what it is." So I got up and got dressed, and I drove on over there.

When I got over there, there were these two white guys waiting for me at the phone booth just like Hank had said. So I followed them on over, around Lake Washington Boulevard or whatever that street is over there that goes around Mercer Island, to Hank's house. I went in, and there was twenty people sitting in there, twenty white people, and Hank and his wife and his bodyguard, they were all Black. Hank was [?old?] everywhere, he had knocks on his eyes, knocks on his ears. [laughs] My impression was he was beaten to death. So the white folks started asking me questions about what had happened and stuff. Well, I wasn't that naive, I was like, "Who the fuck are y'all?" Hank tried to, "This is Judge So-and-so," some judge, some white judge. I wanted to know said this is who the fuck they were. Hank and Judge so-and-so, some judge, some white judge from—what's the next county up here?

[01:26:44] **WILLIAM:** Snohomish.

[01:26:46] **TYREE:** Snohomish County. There was some shady relationship he had with him, him and a bunch of other folks, I don't know today. I bet if I looked at a list of names, I could tie them into something, but I couldn't at that time. I don't know who they are now, I just forgot.

So they started asking me questions about who did this, who did that, and I didn't know. I don't know what happened. I just come out there, and this man was all beat up, and there was this guy called the Bone Crusher walking away. [laughs] That Bone Crusher's name is Earl Nelson, but I didn't know who he was at the time.

[01:27:28] **WILLIAM:** I know Earl.

[01:27:28] **TYREE:** Yeah, Big Earl. You know how big he is.

[01:27:30] **WILLIAM:** He's still, he's emotional.

[01:27:31] **TYREE:** Yeah, he's emotional. That was about all I could add to it.

So then Reverend Gil Lloyd walks in. You know who he is? And Gil Lloyd told a story that had my hair standing on end, and he started talking about—that was the first time I had Keve Bray get introduced into the whole situation. And he said that Keve Bray was like a godfather from the mafia, the Black mafia, that had its headquarters in New York, and he knew about it cause his brother was a cop in New York, and there was a national network and a hookup. This guy that did the beating was flown in here especially for that, and he's now in Canada. This was like four hours later, right? And Gil Lloyd, when he finished running all this down, I was sitting there with my eyes popped. And he was looking at me, and I was looking at him. And they were just as dumbfounded as I was. He told us, "But yes, we've been watching them, they've been watched. Yes, we've had spies on them, they've been watched day in and day out. Keve Bray hasn't left his house in the last ninety-six

hours, he's only been out twice in the last two months." Just bizarre shit. I mean, I'm serious, you wouldn't believe it, the kind of lies Gil Lloyd was telling that night to the white folks. [laughs] And I was sitting there like a naive fool saying, "Oh man, what am I into here?"

Anyway, this went on for hours. Finally I said, "I've got to go, this is like too much for me." So I went home about five o'clock that morning, and somehow the next morning it didn't all seem real, you know? It just didn't seem real. I was out talking to my friends about it and guys in the CCA. I didn't know Reverend Lloyd, really. I didn't know him, I had just seen him, we met at his church a couple of times. But people basically said, "Look man, don't listen to that shit. That was the Bone Crusher." People did explain who the Black United Front was, but that all before my time, when they had the Black United Front politics going.

We went ahead, but let me tell you how this finally got resolved. So what they had seen themselves doing, I guess, was like supporting us, this other segment of people over here, against Hank Roney, and therefore consolidated their relationship with us. So then we decided to have a meeting, I guess the next night or the following night, at Lem Howell's office, the lawyer. So we went down to Lem's office, down in the Metropolitan Building, where he is now, and it was McAdoo, L.B. Curry, Milton Norwood, Milton Dixon, Hershey Sampson—I can't name them all, but about nine or ten of the contractors—[?Connelly?], the real estate broker.

We were all in Lem's office, McAdoo, all of them, Takisaki, around the conference table having a board meeting. That's how the strategy was planned, we was planning for the next day, whatever we were going to be doing, how we were going to carry on the negotiations. We were now involved in the negotiations, that's what it is. There was a knock on the door in Lem's office, and somebody got up and opened the door. Now, keep in mind that these guys from the Black United Front who got one foot in and one foot out, they don't ideologically understand, they're just going to try to get it together. But their loyalty now is getting split, cause at least I'm being like fair. I ain't trying to run no games on nobody, I ain't ripping off. And the other people in CCA tend not to be doing that, so they got a problem with like forsaking us for these other people over here, right? But Milton Norwood and Milton Dixon clearly had one foot in the camp of the Black United Front and one foot in the camp of CCA. It was L.B. Curry trying to play that off, to get what he could get out of it, up. And Hershey Sampson, L.B. was going to use Hershey to back him up, cause Hershey would shoot. It was really like six gun politics then.

We were sitting up in the meeting, and there was a struggle going on for the leadership, like who was going to take it over or whatever, And the Bone Crusher walked in, and Keve Bray acted like he consolidated the leadership to me. [laughs] But the Bone Crusher walks in—it was so absurd. When they opened up the door and he came walking in, he had this shirt on, and the shirt is tied into a knot, and it's open all the way. And he had on this shirt with some jeans. And this is like, it wasn't that cold, but it was in September. And he had this white pearl handled six shooter stuck off in his pants. And he walked into the conference room, put his hands on his hips, and said, "I'm Earl Nelson from the Black United Front, and I've just come to say that I was sent here by the United Front to tell you that this meeting is over. And nobody will speak for the Black community but the man downtown, except Dave Mills, the president of the Black United Front, Keve Bray."

And I had met Dave Mills once before, when he had the voter registration project going. He came by my father's shop one day and asked if we'd do some work. It was a non profit organization trying to get Blacks registered to vote, and I thought that was a good thing, so we went down and put the wiring in for free for him, me and another guy named Harold Wright went down and did it for him one evening. So I thought, "Oh, I know him, I did him a favor one time." So I didn't understand, none of that, that he didn't care I did him a favor.

So I said, "Well look man," and everybody got up and backed away from the table, like they were getting ready. I mean, I'll never forget Curry. Everytime I see him, I talk about it. Curry backed up all the way to the window, he got up and was sitting on the window sill like, "I'm not getting beaten." People was like getting themselves cleared out, and there was a lot of silence. And I said, "Well, look man, who are those people? I know Dave Mills. Why don't you call him and tell him that if he wants to talk to the CCA, he can talk with us, but we make the decisions about what happens." And the Bone Crusher said, "Look, I was sent down here to tell you all that this meeting is over. I ain't holding no negotiations with you. This meeting is over with, and you might as well clear out." So these two guys, both Norwood and Dixon, get on the side of the Black United Front. Curry leaves from the table, and nobody said nothing.

So I said, "Well look, man, I'm going to tell you that this is a contractors' issue, that we raise the issue, and you call him and tell him that we don't care what he says. If they want to talk to us, we're open to talk to anyone in the community, but the decisions made about how this is done, we're going to make the decisions ourselves." And Lem Howell started speaking up. Lem Howell said, "You don't come into my office and tell me what to do whatever." And then he said, "Well, I say people clear out, this meeting is over with. There ain't going to be no meeting, there ain't going to be no speaking." And then some people went out of the room, McAdoo, Takisaki and them and whatever, were standing in the door. And I said, "Well, look you better call him on the phone so we can tell him. What's the phone number?" So he said, "I ain't here to be calling nobody." And I said, "Won't you call him so we can get this thing straight, cause I think we've got to have a meeting, and somebody's making a mistake here."

So the Bone Crusher slipped, he slipped and went and got on the phone. [laughs] See, that's where he fucked up there, cause he had everybody so scared they was going to leave. So they all filtered back into the room, [buzzing noise] which was buzzing now, making some kind of strategy. So at that point me and Lem said, "Fuck them, who are they?" and shit like that. So he came back and said, "I can't negotiate." We said, "Fuck you man, get out of here." And I told him, but Lem was behind me. I said, "Look, you know, you can't come down here with no shit like that. You tell Keve Bray that if he wants a fight we'll go talk with him. We'll go talk with him. Don't you bring your ass down here and talk about shooting us and shit." And the Crusher didn't know what to do. [laughs] He didn't know whether to shoot, or to beat somebody's ass, or what. So he left, and when he left, the rest of them had like made some asses of themselves.